

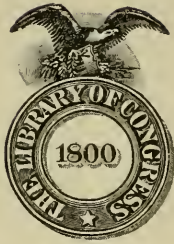
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The Sword of the Lord:

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE HOUSE OF PRAYER, NEWARK, NEW JERSEY,
ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 1861, BEING THE
NATIONAL FAST DAY.

BY EDWARD J. STEARNS, A. M.

OF THE DIOCESE OF MARYLAND,—MINISTER IN CHARGE.

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BY EDWARD J. STEARNS, A. M.

OF THE DIOCESE OF MARYLAND,—MINISTER IN CHARGE.

Shall the sword devour forever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? 2 Samuel, ii. 26.

I am to look, indeed, to your opinions; but to such opinions as you and I *must* have five years hence. I was not to look to the flash of the day.—*Burke*.



BALTIMORE:
JAMES S. WATERS.

1861.

NOTE.

THE publication of this discourse is at the repeated request of friends in Newark and in Baltimore.

The following is from the Newark Daily Advertiser, of September 27 :

An excitement occurred in the House of Prayer, (Episcopal) at the service on Fast Day. The officiating clergyman, Rev. MR. STEARNS, who has been temporarily supplying the place of Rev. MR. SHACKELFORD, in his discourse, pointedly justified the course of the South, and denounced the North.

Several members of the congregation left the house, while others hissed, and the leading Vestryman demanded and procured the manuscript, which has been laid before the United States District Attorney.

In a subsequent number of the same paper appeared the following rejoinder :

To the Editor of the Newark Daily Advertiser :

Allow me to correct two or three mistakes in the paragraph published on Friday, respecting what took place at the House of Prayer last Thursday.

1. The sermon was *borrowed*, and returned the next day; had it been *demande*d, it would not have been given up, except on compulsion.

2. The Senior Warden is a gentleman, and the manuscript did not pass out of his hands, nor was it even seen by any one but himself.

3. The *copy* taken by him, and which he had my permission to use in *any* way he thought best, may have been submitted to the District Attorney. If it was, he is too good a lawyer to have found anything in it requiring or justifying action on his part.

There are some other inaccuracies, but I do not think it worth while to correct them.

Yours respectfully,

NEWARK, Sept. 30, 1861.

E. J. STEARNS.

Those who read the Sermon will see that there is no "justification" of the course of the South, "pointed" or otherwise, from beginning to end; the whole question of the right or wrong of that course having been purposely left untouched, as utterly out of place in the pulpit.

The statements of the sermon might easily be fortified with any amount of proof, but they are too notoriously true to need substantiating.

EDWARD J. STEARNS.

CAMBRIDGE, MARYLAND, *Oct.* 17, 1861.

S E R M O N .

Jer. xlvii. 6, 7.—O THOU SWORD OF THE LORD, HOW LONG WILL IT BE ERE THOU BE QUIET? PUT UP THYSELF INTO THY SCABBARD, REST, AND BE STILL. HOW CAN IT BE QUIET, SEEING THE LORD HATH GIVEN IT A CHARGE AGAINST ASHKELON, AND AGAINST THE SEA-SHORE? THERE HATH HE APPOINTED IT.

THE text, brethren, is not of my selection: the President, in his Proclamation, has virtually, though, I presume, unwittingly, selected it for me, in setting apart this day, for which the chapter containing it is the First Morning Lesson according to the Calendar. Accepting the selection as an appropriate one, let us see what instruction it will suggest to us.

The phrase, "sword of the Lord," hardly needs explanation. In the text, it is the sword in the hand of Pharaoh against the Philistines; in our application of it, which is not only a legitimate, but a peculiarly appropriate one, it is the sword in the hands of brethren "arrayed for mutual slaughter." When Gideon and the hundred that were with him went forth to the battle against the Midianites, at their shout of, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," the Lord set "every man's sword against his fellow," throughout the host of Midian. Surely, it is pre-eminently the sword of the Lord, when a nation is made its own executioner.

"In civil war" says CICERO, "all things are miserable, and nothing more miserable than victory itself." Whichever side is victorious, the Country is vanquished. A war like that in which we are engaged is a sight to "make a holiday in hell."

"Devil with devil damned firm concord holds;
Men, only, disagree!"

"O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, seeing the Lord hath given it a charge against Ashkelon, and against the sea-shore?"

The question *seems* to imply that it cannot be quiet; but comparing Scripture with Scripture, we shall see that that is not necessarily its meaning. The condition on which it can be quiet is not, indeed, expressed, but there *is* a condition, nevertheless. The language is not more absolute and unqualified than that of the prophet against Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown;" yet on the repentance of the people, the city was spared. Nor was theirs an exceptional case; it was in accordance with a fixed principle of the Divine Government. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." *Jer.* xviii. 7.

Repentance, then, is the condition on our part on which the sword of the Lord may be returned to its scabbard; repentance as a people, and not merely as individuals. Let us see, then, what are the especial sins of which we have been guilty as a people.

There are two parties to the present war. You may *call* one the Nation; the other, Traitors and Rebels; but practically it is the North against the South, and the South against the North; for the few at the South who sympathize with the North are *so* few, (especially if you leave out northern-born, and foreign-born,) that they are not worth taking into the account. It is, I say, *practically*, the North against the South, and the South against the North.

If I were preaching to Southern men, under circumstances like the present, I should testify against the sins of the South, (as I have done on more than one occasion,) and not against the sins of the North: and preaching, as I am, to Northern men, I should despise myself, and should deserve to be despised by you, if I could take a different course. No, brethren, God forbid that I should preach to you, on an occasion like this, against another people's sins! It is such preaching that has brought us to this pass. The war we are involved in, is God's judgment upon such preaching. It is not the preaching of the Gospel; its spirit is of the bottomless pit. God forbid that I should join hands with such preaching, or have any sympathy with it. We are gathered together, not to proclaim another people's sins, but to confess our own. And they are not far to seek. We shall find them in the proper lesson from the New Testament* appointed by the Bishop for this Morning's Service, and which you have already listened to, perhaps without observing its peculiar appropriateness.

* St. Luke, xii.

The first is Pharisaism,—“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees.” This is the crying sin of the North, and it is one that has been growing on us for years, until we have become not only tintured, but saturated, with it. Particularly is this the case with the ministers of some of the leading denominations. (I speak of them as a body, there are exceptions.) Thirty years ago they preached about the sins of the heathen. How? In sorrow, not in anger? Why? To move their people to pity the nations perishing for lack of vision, and send them the light of the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God. And noble was the response to their appeal, and noble were the results. Now, they preach against the sins of the South. How? In anger, not in sorrow. Why? To move their people to hatred against their brethren. I am not bearing false witness against my neighbor. I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen. Their sermons have been given to the world by the daily and the weekly press; scattered to the four winds by papers that count their readers by tens of thousands, some of them by hundreds of thousands. I have read these sermons by scores, and they fully bear me out in my assertion. Charity itself can say nothing else of their language than that it is not only calculated, but *intended* to set North and South by the ears; to exasperate the one, and to add to the self-righteousness of the other. These men are not fools; they know well that Pharisaism, though it has often made converts to itself, never yet made a convert to Christianity. And yet they continue year after year to flaunt their own righteousness and their neighbor’s sins in the face of the community, till, now, you can scarcely meet a Northern man who does not coolly *assume* the superiority of the North over the South in everything that is “true,” and “honest,” and “just,” and “pure,” and “lovely,” and “of good report.” I myself have met with more than one, or two, or three, such instances in this congregation; instances, not of a feeling of personal superiority, but of a most comfortable consciousness of belonging to a *very* superior community. Why even your children are full of it, and running over with it. To me, who know both parts of the country thoroughly, who know that, while each has its virtues, each its faults, nine-tenths of all the infidelity, nine-tenths of all the divorces, nine-tenths of all the bribery of electors and legislators, is at the North, all this would be provocative of a smile, were it not for the terrible calamity it has helped to bring on, and is helping to continue.

Nor is it in the bearing of the North toward the South only, that this Pharisaism has manifested itself: it *sticks out* (it’s a homely phrase, but I know of no other that will express the truth so forcibly)

in our bearing as a nation toward other nations, in which, though the South has heretofore had its share, yet the North has been held mainly responsible, to the extent even, on the part of those nations, of turning the word "Yankee" from a provincial, into a national, appellation. "Proud self-sufficiency, boasting complacency in our institutions and their attendant prosperity, and arrogant disregard of justice to the weak, and courtesy to the strong, in our national relations," are the words of the Bishop of MARYLAND in his late Pastoral, under which the people of that Diocese are assembled at this very hour; and we know, and all the world knows, that they are true words. At the breaking out of our present difficulties, we were on the verge of a war with PERU: who believes that for such a cause we should have gone to such an extent, if it had been FRANCE, or even SPAIN? Who believes that, if Mexico had been our Northern neighbor, instead of England, we should have consented to a compromise boundary line from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, or that having afterwards taken possession of a disputed island, we should, at her instance, have withdrawn from it the greater part of our forces, to await further negotiations? And these are but specimens. Our "offence is rank." It has "made us to stink" in the nostrils of the nations, and now, that the day of our retribution is upon us, very naturally they "laugh at our calamity, and mock when our fear cometh."

"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." *Pharisee, and hypocrite*, seem used interchangeably in the New Testament: "When thou doest thy alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. * * * * And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward." And so in various other places.

And as it was in the time of our Lord, so is it in our day: if Pharisaism and hypocrisy went together then, they go together now.

I have already spoken of our Pharasaism: now for a few instances of our hypocrisy.

A merchant ship of ours took license to dig guano from the temporary revolutionary authority of a petty port in PERU, and was seized by the legitimate government for violating its revenue laws; whereupon, we demanded redress for the seizure, and threatened war in case of refusal, thus recognizing as *de facto* a government that extended only over a mere corner of the country, and so ephemeral that it lasted, if I recollect aright, but a few days; and yet when ENGLAND

and FRANCE recognized merely as a *belligerent* the "Confederate" States, embracing nearly one-third of the whole number, and in most of which there had not been for months previous, and were not likely to be for months to come, any courts of law, or officers of justice, of the UNITED STATES, to execute its behests, we cried out with most virtuous indignation against the recognition as an outrage upon our nationality.

We denied the right of a nation to blockade its own ports, when it was the king of NAPLES that was to exercise it; but when it is we that are to exercise it, Oh! then it is quite another matter.

In the war of the Revolution, our privateers swarmed upon the ocean, proving themselves a very important and effective agency in the acquisition of our independence, and from that time down to the beginning of the present war, we have recognized privateering as a legitimate mode of warfare, having, not five years ago, *deliberately* refused to consent to its abolition, except upon terms, the acceptance of which would relieve us of all further need of it; but now, forsooth, it is piracy, and we threaten to hang at the yard-arm those who are taken in it.

Soon after the breaking out of the war, a leading Northern Journal, whose editor was in the confidence of the Government, recommended the stirring up of a negro insurrection, and there were plenty to approve the recommendation; now, it is reported that the South has taken into its service a regiment of Indians,—not the wild Indians of the forest, but the civilized Indians of the Indian Territory,—and we cry out against it as an act of "Barbarism."

An officer of the United States marches into an enemy's city, in time of war, enters a public house, goes up to the roof, and strikes down a flag that the landlord had put upon it: as he comes down the stairs, the landlord, against overwhelming odds, and at the certainty of losing his own life, waylays and kills him, and that is *assassination*; a negro is taken prisoner, with others, by a privateer: watching his opportunity, he steals upon the officers and kills them in their sleep, and that is *heroism*.

For months, we have been most vehemently asseverating that the war we are waging is not waged against the social system of the South, and have been most virtuously indignant at the (alleged) studied and persistent misrepresentations of our purposes by Southern Generals and Journals; now, a General of our own, proclaims freedom to the slaves of "Rebels,"—nine-tenths of the whole number,—and we endorse the proclamation, and cry out against the President for modifying it.

For years, our consciences have been reproaching us with our responsibility for Southern slavery, and we have declared that we wished the South would withdraw from the Union, but that there was no such good news; that she couldn't be *kicked* out.—I, myself, have heard this language from scores of respectable Northern men; for respectable men don't always use respectable language.—Now that she takes us at our word, and relieves us of our responsibility, in the way of our own choice, *and the only possible way*, we won't be relieved of it.

For years, we have been twitting the South with being a bill of expense to us—so we have facetiously termed it—for her Post offices, Custom Houses, &c.—The stomach, I believe, is a bill of expense to the hands, and causes them a good deal of hard work.—Now that she is ready to shoulder the burden, or, rather, *has* shouldered it, we saddle ourselves with another burden a hundred times as heavy, to get the old burden back.

Last year, a distinguished Northern Governor and member of the bar, then a private citizen, addressing a meeting of his fellow citizens, took exception to one of the watchwords of the hour, “The Union, the Constitution, and the enforcement of the Laws.” Laws were not made, he said, to be enforced against a community, but only against exceptional individual transgressors. This sentiment was endorsed a few weeks after, by 106,000 Northern freemen. Now, this same Governor is first among the foremost to enforce them at the cannon's mouth; and the 106,000 say, Amen.

Last winter, we were loud in our complaints that Northern men were arrested at the South, on frivolous charges, and sent home. Now, Southern men, whom I know as I know *you*, and whom, before God, I believe to be *us* innocent of crime, are taken from their beds at midnight, on *no* charge, and sent *away from* home, to be confined in Northern fortresses, and not allowed their Constitutional *right* of a “speedy and public trial,” and to be confronted with their accusers; and, to clap the climax, not a single reason vouchafed even at the call of Congress; and yet, our complaints, if any, are few, and not loud. But, then, it was the Southern bull that gored the Northern ox; now, it is the Northern bull that gores the Southern ox; and that makes all the difference in the world.

Twenty years ago, we moved heaven and earth because the right of petition was violated in the persons of certain citizens of Massachusetts, *though the petition was for the dissolution of the Union*. Now, a man is arrested, by the police, in the streets of a neighboring city, for trying to get people to sign a petition to Congress for a restoration of peace.

Fifteen years ago, or thereabouts, the great Northern statesman and defender of the Constitution. gave utterance to these sentiments :

“Important as I deem it to discuss, on all proper occasions, the policy of the measures at present pursued, it is still more important to maintain the right of such discussion in its full and just extent. Sentiments lately sprung up, and now growing popular, render it necessary to be explicit on this point. It is the ancient and constitutional right of this people to canvass public measures, and the merits of public men. It is a homebred right, a fireside privilege. It has ever been enjoyed in every house, cottage and cabin in the nation. It is not to be drawn into controversy. It is as undoubted as the right of breathing the air and walking on the earth. Belonging to private life as a right, it belongs to public life as a duty; and it is the last duty which those whose representative I am, shall find me to abandon. This high constitutional privilege, I shall defend and exercise within this House, and without this House, and in all places; *in time of war*, in time of peace, and at all times. Living, I will assert it—dying, I will assert it; and, should I leave no other legacy to my children, by the blessing of God, I will leave them the inheritance of free principles, and the example of a manly, independent, and constitutional defence of them.”

These sentiments went, then, to the universal heart of the North.

Still stronger, only a year ago, was the language of the distinguished Governor before referred to :

“I care not for the truth or error of the opinions held or uttered, nor for the wisdom of the words *or time of their attempted expression*, when I consider this great question of fundamental significance—this great right which must first be secured before society can be said to stand on any foundation, but only on temporary and capricious props. Rich or poor, white or black, great or small, wise or foolish, in season or *out of season*, in the right or in the wrong—whosoever will speak, let him speak, and whosoever will hear, let him hear. And let no one pretend to the prerogative of judging another man’s liberty. In this respect, there is, and there can be, no superiority of persons, or privileges, nor the slightest pretext for any.”

These words, though uttered in behalf of those who denounced the Constitution of their country as “a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell,” were vociferously applauded by those who heard them, and the utterer was soon after placed in the chair of JOHN HANCOCK.

This was but one short year ago. Now, in the same part of the country, and all over the North, newspapers are broken up, their

editors mobbed, freemen sought to be browbeaten and dragooned into the renunciation of their manhood at the bidding of the majority, and a Reign of Terror attempted to be inaugurated that would put to the blush that of the French Revolution. And all this in the name of Constitutional liberty!

O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, when such unblushing hypocrisy stalks through the land?

“Beware of the *leaven* of the Pharisees.” There is a peculiar appropriateness in the term, in our case. It is the nature of leaven to puff up, and thus give seeming at the expense of substance, which, though a good thing in bread, up to a certain limit, is a bad thing in a people. It is its nature, also, to make its way secretly through the mass. Such has been its working in us. Commencing in a little handful of fanatics, it has diffused itself slowly but surely throughout the community, till, at length, it has not only leavened the whole lump, but actually turned it sour. It will be a marvellous alchemy that shall restore it to its pristine sweetness. Batter, when soured, is easily sweetened again; but stiff dough is hard to penetrate.

“And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.”

If I were to follow out the train of thought suggested by *this* part of the lesson, I should be introducing things that have no business here. My object in noting the request, is to call your attention to our LORD’s answer; for it contains a lesson and a warning for us: And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

Busybodyism-in-other-mens-matters, is an especial sin of ours. It came over in the MAYFLOWER, leaving enough behind it to overthrow, in its madness, the Throne and the Church; and now, and here, it has overthrown the country. It has been at the bottom of almost all our troubles from the beginning, and now it seems bent on following up its work to the bitter end. O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thy self into thy scabbard, rest, and be still. How can it be quiet, so long as we will insist on taking God’s work into our hands? He only has the right to intermeddle, for with Him only it is not intermeddling.

Non omnia possumus omnes. There is a limit to human responsibility. A generous and appreciative sympathy with those with whom we are connected by ties of kindred, or neighborhood, or country,—an affectionate interest in whatever concerns them as men, and especially as Christian men, is praiseworthy; but *intruded interference* is offensive to God and man, and would be contemptible, but for its terrible capability for mischief.

There are many other points, in the lesson, worthy of note, but I have not time to note them. Let me express the hope that you will read the Chapter for yourselves, and ponder on it; especially, on the last paragraph, beginning, "When thou goest with thy adversary to the magistrate," which hints at several stages in a quarrel, at each of which there is room for reconciliation, but plainly declares a final stage, which once reached, we may not come out till we have paid "the very last mite."

Such, brethren, are our faults,—the faults of which we have been guilty as a people, before the world, and before God.

And now, what is the remedy? Repentance. Humiliation before God, for our Pharisaism as a people, our hypocrisy, our meddling disposition.

And the repentance, to be worth anything, must bring forth "fruits meet for repentance." If, by lifting my finger, I could bring back the Country to where it was last year, I would not do it, unless I could bring back the old feeling of brotherhood; and *that* the events of the last few weeks have, I fear, rendered impossible. SAID BURKE, in 1780, "I confess to you freely, that the sufferings and distresses of the people of America in this cruel war have at times affected me more deeply than I can express. I felt every gazette of triumph as a blow upon my heart, which has a hundred times sunk and fainted within me at all the mischiefs brought upon those who bear the whole brunt of war in the heart of their country. Yet the Americans are utter strangers to me; a nation among whom I am not sure that I have a single acquaintance." These words were uttered *in time of war*; a war, too, *for the dismemberment of the Empire*. They were not uttered in Parliament, where the utterer might have pleaded privilege; they were uttered to the electors of BRISTOL, when he was a candidate for re-election, and was, therefore, giving an account of his stewardship. What BURKE could give utterance to, in "despotic" ENGLAND, under a "tyrant" King, in the "unenlightened" Eighteenth Century, surely I may give utterance to, in free AMERICA, under a Constitutional President, in the enlightened Nineteenth Century. "I confess to you," then, "freely," that I have felt, within the last few weeks, "every gazette of triumph as a blow upon my heart," for I have seemed to hear in it the knell of my country. God grant my forebodings be not realized!

Five years earlier, the same great statesman, one of the greatest, if not the greatest, ENGLAND ever had, in his speech "on Conciliation with America," said:

“With regard to the high aristocratic spirit of Virginia and the Southern Colonies, it has been proposed, I know, to reduce it, by declaring a general enfranchisement of their slaves. This project has had its advocates and panegyrists, yet I never could argue myself into an opinion of it. Slaves are often much attached to their masters. A general wild offer of liberty would not always be accepted. History furnishes few instances of it. It is sometimes as hard to persuade slaves to be free as it is to compel freemen to be slaves; and in this auspicious scheme, we should have both these pleasing tasks on our hands at once. * * * * * The second mode under consideration is to prosecute that spirit in its overt acts as *criminal*.

“At this proposition I must pause a moment. The thing seems a great deal too big for my ideas of jurisprudence. It should seem, to my way of conceiving such matters, that there is a very wide difference in reason and policy between the mode of proceeding on the irregular conduct of scattered individuals, or even bands of men, who disturb order within the state, and the civil dissensions which may, from time to time, on great questions, agitate the several communities which compose a great empire. It looks to me to be narrow and pedantic to apply the ordinary ideas of criminal justice to this great public contest. I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people. I cannot insult and ridicule the feelings of millions of my fellow-creatures, as Sir Edward Coke insulted one excellent individual at the bar. I am not ripe to pass sentence on the gravest public bodies, intrusted with magistracies of great authority and dignity, and charged with the safety of their fellow-citizens, upon the very title that I am. I really think that, for wise men, this is not judicious; for sober men, not decent; for minds tinctured with humanity, not mild and merciful.”

Weighty words of a wise man; but, like many other great utterances, they were not popular in their day. The *House of Commons* decided against them by a majority of 270 to 78. Posterity has reversed their decision; let us see to it that it do not reverse ours.

BURKE “knew not the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people.” We, in our wisdom, find it a very easy matter. Wholesale denunciation of a people, as “ignorant,” “barbarous,” “thieves,” “pirates,” “cut-throats,” and so on, through the whole vocabulary of abuse, is very easy,—“as easy as lying;” but what good result it can accomplish, except to recoil upon the utterer, it would be hard to tell.

Said ANDREW JACKSON, to one who was intruding advice where it was not wanted, “I knew a man who made a fortune by minding his own business.” Brethren, if we are ever to make our fortune—the

fortune of our country—the fortune of our Church, the Church of the future, because it is the Church of the past, depend upon it, it will be by minding our own business. God has assigned us our task; let us set ourselves to do it as “in the Great Taskmaster’s eye,” not “stretching ourselves beyond our measure,” but keeping to the pattern given us to go by. When we have cast the beam out of our own eye, (which is not likely to be till the millennium,) then we may see clearly to pluck the mote out of our brother’s eye. Meanwhile, God give us grace to look with anger on our own sins, and with sorrow on the sins of others.

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